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Author Armour, A.S

Accession No. 1828

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THE COINER

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

BERNARD DUFFY

DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS LIMITED
85 TALBOT STREET

CHARACTERS:

JAMES CANATT ..... *A small Farmer*

CATHERINE CANATT ..... *His Wife*

JOHN CANATT ..... *Their Son*

TOM M'CLIPPEN ..... *A Travelling Tinker*

A POLICE SERGEANT.

Scene ..... CANATT'S KITCHEN

Time ..... THE PRESENT DAY

The Coiner

The scene is laid in Canatt's Kitchen. The street door is at the back of the stage with a window on one side and a dresser on the other. There is a door on the right and an open fire-place on the left. There is a lighted candle on the table and a kettle on the hob. As the curtain goes up Canatt is discovered at the fire-place arranging coals with the tongs in order to nurse a small flame. A prolonged rumble of thunder is heard followed by a loud tinny crash just outside the door. Canatt starts.

Canatt. 'Am dam but that's a thunderbolt! (*There is a loud knocking at the street door*). Can't be, then. Thunderbolts don't knock when they want to get in.

(*The knocking is repeated and Canatt leaves down the tongs, and going to the door opens it, revealing M'Clippen standing on the doorstep with a stick in his hand and a sack beside him*).

Canatt. Well?

M'Clippen. Shockin' night.

Canatt. It is.

M'Clippen. I suppose I can come in?

Canatt. We never keep anyone here.

M'Clippen. I don't want to live all my life with you, but you might give me shelter until the storm blows over. You wouldn't keep a dog out on a night like this.

Canatt. As a matter of fact I'm after putting out my own dog. But you can come in.

M'Clippen. Thank ye (*lifting sack*). I'll take this in too, if you don't mind. (*He enters and places sack and stick against the wall near the door*). I'm a tinker, and there's tins in that, an' if they got rusty they wouldn't sell, d'ye see? (*He takes off his hat and shakes the rain off it*). I've walked twelve miles this blessed day.

Canatt (*with an effort at hospitality, pointing to a chair*). Maybe you'd like to sit down.

M'Clippen (*sitting down*). Thank ye. I'm as tired as an' ould horse, an' I have a hunger on me that'd do for two.

Canatt. Have you now?

M'Clippen. Divil a lie in it, an' what's worse, I have nothin' to take the edge off it.

Canatt. I'm sorry to say there's not a bit in the house that I could let you have.

M'Clippen. Worse an' worse. We're brothers in misfortune. But it's good of you to be sorry.

Canatt (*explaining*). When I was finished my own tay the dog took what was left. That's the raison he's outside now.

M'Clippen. Well, well. A kind man is

kind to his dog. (*He produces a short black clay pipe and some matches*). You don't object to smokin', d'ye?

Canatt. Smoke away: I don't mind.

M'Clippen (*drily*). Thank ye. (*He tries to strike the matches but they fail to ignite, and he throws them on the floor in disgust*). Bad cess to them, they're wet. Could you oblige me with a dry one?

(*Canatt picks up one of the discarded matches, and lights it at the candle. He offers it to M'Clippen who lights his pipe with it*).

M'Clippen. Thank ye. (*He puffs meditatively*). I'm just wonderin' now whether it's better to be a full dog out in the storm, or an empty tinker within in a house.

Canatt. It'd be a hard question to settle.

M'Clippen. I used to believe that the Irish was noted for their hospitality, but I'm beginning to change my mind.

Canatt. Listen now. There's provisions in that dresser there, an' its not me heart that prevents me from givin' you a share of them.

M'Clippen. An' what else is doin' it?

Canatt. The wife. She'd nearly know if you had a whiff of the smell of the bacon. If I gave you anything I'd never hear the end of it.

M'Clippen. She must be very thrifty.

Canatt. Thrifty! Man she'd skin a flea for

his hide. I suppose you're not married yourself?

M'Clippen. Ah no, I'm a lone bachelor.

Canatt (dryly). You don't know what you're missin'. An' you may thank your lucky stars for that.

M'Clippen. Is it as bad as that?

Canatt. Aye, an' worse.

M'Clippen. D'ye mind the song "The ould Divil came to the man at the Plow?"

Canatt. I do not then.

M'Clippen. It goes like this. (*He sings*):—

"The ould Divil came he to the man at the plow
Sayin' your scouldin' ould wife I must have now."

Refrain:
Ri fol, ri fol, fol de lol lay.

Canatt. I'll bet he let the divil have her.

M'Clippen. He did, me boy, an' (*He sings*):—
"So the divil he hoisted her up on his back,
An' off to his kingdom hurried the pack.
(*Refrain*).

There were two little divils aplayin' with chains
Said 'Take her away or she'll dash out our brains.'
(*Refrain*).

There were two other divils aplayin' at ball
Said 'Take her away or she'll murder us all.'
(*Refrain*).

So the divil he hoisted her up on his back
And back to her ould man hurried the pack.
(*Refrain*).

Says he, 'My good man, here's your ould wife
back again
For she wouldn't be kept, not even in hell.
(*Refrain*).

'For I've been a divil for the most of my life,
But ne'er was in hell till I met your wife.'
(*Refrain*).

They were seven years goin' and nine comin'
back,
Yet she asked th' ould scrape she'd left in the
pot.
(*Refrain*).

So it's true that the women are worse than the
men
For even from hell they are sent back again."
(*Refrain*).

Canatt. That's a true song. But I wouldn't like Catherine to hear you singin' it.

M'Clippen. Where is she now? She's not within, is she? (*indicating room door*).

Canatt. She's down with me son, seein' her sister, an' I don't know what time she'll be back.

M'Clippen. Maybe, then, if we got in some provisions (*taking a bright half-crown from his pocket and spinning it in the air*) we might be able to share them before they'd come in.

Canatt. Bedad, we might.

M'Clippen (*handing him the half-crown*). Well, take that and see what's the best you can do.

(*Canatt looks curiously at the coin and turns it over in his hand*).

M'Clippen. Dye s'ee anything wrong with it?

Canatt. No, except that it looks very new.

M'Clippen (*carelessly*). It ought to look new. I made six like that last week.

Canatt (*aghast*). Ye—made—six! Man if you were caught, you'd be transported.

M'Clippen (*complacently*). No fear of that. That coin will pass any test for silver.

(*Canatt rings it on the table, and then bites it*).

M'Clippen. If you're doubtin' it, ask the people in the shop where you'll get the provisions to test it. Say you're not sure of it.

Canatt. I'll go now. (*He rises and puts on*

his hat). I'll not be long away; the shop is only a few perches down the road.

(*He goes to the street door, and, removing the key from the inside of the lock, inserts it in the outside. The tinker watches him with a twinkle in his eye*).

M'Clippen. Are you thinkin' of locking the door on the outside?

Canatt. I am. Someone might drop in and spoil our evenin'.

M'Clippen (*ironically*). Or I might wander out and lose my little self in the dark.

Canatt (*pointedly*). Ye might.

M'Clippen. An' I mightn't. You haven't the worth of my good half-crown in the whole caboose.

Canatt. You're mighty polite.

M'Clippen. There's two of us so.

Canatt. Heh! (*putting on his hat*) I'll not be long.

(*Catherine appears at the door, followed by John*).

Catherine. You'll not be long where?

Canatt (*indicating the tinker*). Me dear, this is a gentleman——

Catherine. (*Surveying M'Clippen with arms akimbo*). An' is that a gentleman? Well, now, I'd never have thought it.

M'Clippen (*rising*). Ma'am, I'm a tinker by profession.

Catherine. Well, Mr. Tinker, we're not in need of any tins at present.

M'Clippen. I wasn't trying to push trade, ma'am; I only came in for shelter out of the storm.

Catherine (*pointedly*). It's a grand night now.

(*A rumble of thunder is heard*).

M'Clippen. It sounds like it, ma'am; there's nothing as grand as a thunderstorm.

Canatt. It's no night for any Christian to be out.

Catherine (*sharply*). An' if it's not, where were you gallivantin' off to?

Canatt. I was just goin' down to the shop for provisions for this dacent man.

Catherine. You had little to do runnin' the penny-boy.

Canatt. He gave me a half-crown.

Catherine (*mollified*). Did he, then! He's very free with his money I must say.

M'Clippen. Well, ma'am, I have a large empty space where me dinner ought to be, and as I was, so to speak, partakin' of your hospitality, I didn't see why you should be out of pocket on my account. So I thought your good man might get something we could share—that is, if I'm not trespassin' too much.

Catherine. Ah, sure you're welcome.

Canatt. I suppose I may as well go on to the shop.

John. I'll go, father.

Catherine. Yes, you go, John. You're wet already, an' I don't want to be dryin' two coats instead of one. Get a couple of pound of corned beef, and a loaf, and a pound of sugar.

(*Canatt hands the half-crown to John*).

M'Clippen. An' ask the people in the shop if that's a good half-crown.

John. All right, I'll be back in two shakes of a goat's tail.

(*He goes out. Catherine takes off her shawl and goes over to the fireplace*).

Catherine. Well, I declare! there's the kettle sittin' on the hob and it may be stone could. (*To Canatt*). How well you wouldn't think of puttin' it on. Arrah, sure men are the shiftless cratures.

(*She puts on the kettle*).

M'Clippen. They are indeed, ma'am, an' that's what often leaves them shirtless.

(*Canatt laughs*).

Catherine (*turning on him*). What are you laughin' at, you ould omadhaun, when you ought to be takin' in the words of this dacent man, that has the experience of the world in him?

M'Clippen. Faith ma'am, I have little else in me this minute—except hunger.

Catherine (*going to the dresser and taking out*

a bag of tea and placing it on the table near the tinker). Ah, sure you'll not be long so. I'll have some nice hot tea ready in a minute.

M'Clippen (*tentatively*). I suppose you're all teetotallers here?

Canatt (*with an air of resignation*). We are, indeed: we all have the pledge for life.

M'Clippen (*pityingly*). Dear me! D'ye tell me that?

Catherine. D'ye see anything wrong in takin' the pledge for life?

M'Clippen. Not at all, ma'am, not at all. Every time I take the pledge myself, I take it for life. I haven't it at present. But no matter. (*He picks up the tea bag and begins to read off it*):—

"A cup of good tea
Is acknowledged to be
A famous restorer in sadness,
It quickens life's flame
And enlivens the frame
And infuses a spirit of gladness."

We'll just see whether it does or not.

(*Catherine bustles about making the tea and arranging plates, knives, etc. on the table*).

Canatt. It's a wonder to me that you're a travellin' tinker at all when you might be a millionaire if you liked.

M'Clippen. Not much chance of making a million an' me dodgin' the police every minute in the day.

Catherine (*placing the tea-pot on the table*). An' what causes you to be dodgin' the police, good man?

M'Clippen. I mean I'd have to dodge them if I was makin' too much money.

Catherine. Arrah, what would that have to do with them?

Canatt. You see, Catherine, he makes half-crowns.

Catherine. Well, what about that?

Canatt. He coins them. He made that one John took to the shop.

Catherine (*horrified*). Well, I declare! Are you not ashamed to look dacent people in the face, after sending out that poor boy to buy provisions with—the wages of sin?

M'Clippen. I've worked out the morality of it long ago. An' it's this——

(*John enters bearing a parcel which he places on the table*).

John (*handing the money to M'Clippen*). That's the change.

M'Clippen. An' what did they say in the shop about the half-crown?

John (*taking off his coat and hanging it up to dry*). They said they wouldn't mind buy-

ing half-crowns like them for two and fivepence.

M'Clippen (*complacently*). They'd say the same in the Bank of Ireland.

Catherine (*removing paper from parcels*). Will you have some tea, John? It'll be drawn in a minute.

John. I'm not hungry, mother.

(*He begins to remove the mud from his boots in a corner*).

M'Clippen. Well, now, as to that question we were discussin' when our young friend came in.

John. What question is that?

Catherine. Don't be so curious. Curiosity killed a cat.

John (*nettled*). I don't care whether it did or not. You needn't treat me like a child.

M'Clippen. Well, then if you want to know, the question was whether it's right or wrong to coin money.

John. Of course it's wrong.

M'Clippen. There's not so much of the "of course" about it, me fine young fellow. The way I look at it is this: (*To Canatt*). D'ye grow oats?

Canatt. A little.

M'Clippen. Now, supposin' you were to sell that oats to the Government for cavalry horses and you were paid in half-crowns, d'ye think

they'd be committin' a sin in givin' them to you?

John. How would that be a sin?

M'Clippen. Do you know that silver costs the Government only one an' six an ounce?

Canatt. Is it a fact?

M'Clippen. It is. An' let me tell you that there's only one ounce in two half-crowns. So they only give you ninepence worth of silver for every half-crown.

Canatt. Well, now, aren't they the robbers?

M'Clippen. Not at all: that's their margin of profit for the trouble of coinin' them. It's all a matter of degree. So you see if you or me made half-crowns we'd be like the Government, having our margin too. It's only a question of what's a fair margin.

Canatt. There's sense in what you say, sure enough.

John. Aye, but you're not the Government, you know.

M'Clippen. Man, but you're the clever lad to discover that!

John. An' no one else has the right to make half-crowns.

M'Clippen (*as if pained at his lack of intelligence*). I thought I explained all that.

John. You did—in your own way; but that's not an honest way.

M'Clippen. Are ye castin' reflections on me character?

Canatt. Arrah, don't mind him, he's just a bit foolish.

Catherine (*to M'Clippen*). He thinks he takes after himself, but he doesn't; he's not such a fool as he looks.

M'Clippen. Well, sure, that's some consolation.

John (*angered*). That's the way always. Every time I open my mouth in this house the nose is cut off me. An' even the very tramps off the road are encouraged to have a welt at me.

Canatt. If you wouldn't be puttin' in your cutty among the spoons, you'd come off safer.

John. Well, then, I'll relieve you of my company.

(*He rises and puts on his coat*).

Catherine. Where are you off to now?

John (*ramming his hat down on his head*). I'm goin' down to the hall, where I'll have some comfort.

Catherine. You'll get your death of could puttin' on that damp coat.

John. I don't care tuppence whether I do or not.

(*He goes out and slams the door behind him*).

M'Clippen. Ah, I don't blame him; he's very young—very young.

(*Catherine begins to pour out the tea*).

Catherine. Draw up to the table now and have your tea.

(*They draw up their chairs and she hands them cups*).

M'Clippen (*looking into the cup disgustedly*). Heh!

Catherine. Is the tea too strong!

M'Clippen (*sarcastically*). Strong, ma'am? I could spear a shark in forty fathoms of it!

Catherine (*taking the cup*). I'll put it back in the pot and give it a stir.

(*She does so, and fills M'Clippen's cup again, adding a little milk. M'Clippen eyes the mixture critically*).

Catherine. Maybe you'd like more milk?

M'Clippen. If I'm not deprivin' the cat.

Catherine (*with an effort at heartiness*). There'll be enough for her. She doesn't drink much milk.

M'Clippen. That's not *her* fault, I'm sure.

Catherine (*sharply*). Eh?

M'Clippen (*innocently*). It's her misfortune, the creature. Sure we all have our misfortunes.

Canatt. *You* can't have many, anyhow, an' you able to make as much money as you like.

M'Clippen. I only make enough for my needs.

Canatt. How much, now, could you make in a day?

M'Clippen (*as if considering*). I could make —ah—I could make a fair share. That's not bad corned beef.

Catherine. Maybe you'd like some more?

M'Clippen. You can read me very thoughts.

(*Canatt passes him another slice of corned beef*).

Canatt. I suppose you find it hard to get the material to work with?

M'Clippen. What material—is it tin you mane?

Canatt. No—not tin—the other stuff.

M'Clippen. Oh, that! I can get that any day of the week in—have you any more tay in the pot?

Catherine (looking into the pot). It's nearly empty—I'll put more water into it.

M'Clippen. Do—an' more tay as well.

(*Catherine fills the pot*).

Canatt. You were sayin' that you could get the stuff any day in the week in——

M'Clippen. In any shop that keeps it—it's common enough.

Canatt. Common, did you say?

M'Clippen. I did.

Canatt. An' if it's common why doesn't more people make use of it?

M'Clippen. They're like yourself; they'd never think of makin' bright half-crowns with

it unless they were tould how to do it by some smart fella.

Catherine. Like yourself.

M'Clippen. Spare me blushes.

Canatt. We will. Maybe now, you'd sell the secret.

M'Clippen. Maybe I would, an' maybe I wouldn't. It depends.

Canatt. It depends on what?

M'Clippen. On who'd ask me, an' what he'd offer.

Canatt. If it was meself now?

M'Clippen. Ah, now you're talking. If it was yourself now, as you are so dacent an' so hospitable, I might.

Canatt. What will you take?

M'Clippen. Another slice of the corned beef, as you are so pressin'.

Canatt (*passing him the beef*). I mane for the secret.

(*M'Clippen fills his mouth with food but does not reply*).

Canatt (*impatiently*). I was askin' you what you'd take for the saycret?

M'Clippen (*gulping down his food*). I heard you; but I mind hearin' one time that it was rude to speak with your mouth full; an' mine was so full that I couldn't speak, even if I wanted to. You were wantin' to know the price of the saycret.

Canatt. I was.

M'Clippen. Well, now, what would you give?

Canatt. I'd give what I think it'd be worth.

M'Clippen. In troth you wouldn't do any such thing; you wouldn't be let.

Canatt. I'm the master in my own house.

M'Clippen. You're not. It's herself here that wears the trousers.

Catherine (*tartly*). That's none of your business anyway.

Canatt. As a matter of fact you ought to give it to me for nothing.

M'Clippen. An' how do you make that out, me ould joker?

Canatt. Because I could tell the police on you.

M'Clippen. Bedad, so you could.

Canatt. An' I might think it me duty to do so.

M'Clippen. Arrah! what good would that do you?

Canatt. It'd aise me conscience.

M'Clippen. It needs aise, I suppose.

Catherine. No matter whether it does or not. He could have you locked up if he liked.

M'Clippen. An' what evidence would you have?

Canatt. D'ye think I don't know that you have the materials in the bag?

M'Clippen. An' dam but you're a cute ould divil.

Canatt. Amn't I right?

M'Clippen. You are right.

(*He goes to the sack and takes out a small oblong box*).

M'Clippen (*tapping the box*). Every scrap of evidence is in this, but I'll do away with it before the police sees it.

Canatt (*alarmed*). What d'ye mane?

M'Clippen. I'll burn the whole box of tricks now before your face an' if you try to stop me (*he lifts the stick*) I'll open your head with this.

Catherine (*pleading*). Ah, you wouldn't hit an ould man with that.

M'Clippen (*looking at the stick*). Perhaps I'd better not; I might injure my good stick. (*He drops the stick and lifts the tongs*). These'll serve me better.

(*A knock is heard at the street door. M'Clippen lowers the tongs. Catherine goes to the door and opens it, revealing the Sergeant*).

Sergeant. Good-night, Mrs. Canatt. Would you mind if I sheltered with you until this shower blows over?

Catherine. Come in, an' welcome.

(*The Sergeant enters*).

M'Clippen. Good-night, Head Constable.

Sergeant (*correcting him, but looking*

pleased). Sergeant, me good man. Sergeant—at present.

Catherine. Please goodness you won't be long so.

Canatt. Won't you sit down, Sergeant, and have a heat at the fire? (*He pushes a chair forward*).

Sergeant (*sitting down*). It's hardly worth me while, but I may as well take the weight off my legs.

Catherine. It's a terrible night for anyone to have to be out.

Sergeant. Aye, indeed; I was just walkin' down a bit with the patrol when the rain started again.

Canatt. I suppose the men'll have to go to the end of their beat, no matter whether it's wet or dry.

Sergeant. They will, the unfortunate devils: it's in the regulations and it must be done—not that it would make the slightest differ whether they did or not.

M'Clippen. Is trade slack with you, then, sergeant?

Sergeant. Slack! Nothing ever happens in this part of the country except drunk and disorderlies or carts without lights—there's never a chance of a smart bit of detective work.

Canatt. That's more in your line, Sergeant.

Sergeant. Ah, yes, that's my line—it was it

that got me these. (*He taps the stripes on his arm*). A fella that was obtainin' money under false pretences—sellin' brass watches at a fair an' pretendin' they were gold. I got great praise for that—an' these (*he taps the stripes again*).

Catherine (*with a malicious glance at M'Clippen*). I suppose, Sergeant, if you had another case like that they'd make you a Head Constable?

Sergeant. They would, ma'am, I think. Merit sometimes gets to the top, you know.

M'Clippen. You'd get the rise; but supposin' there was an informer—a common informer—in the case, what would *he* get?

Sergeant. He'd get thanks from the bench, and a hell of a time for the rest of his life from his neighbours.

M'Clippen. An' supposin' the informer was mixed up in it himself—if he helped, we'll say, to pass off the goods, knowin' what they were—how would he come off then?

Sergeant. He'd come off a bit lighter maybe than the other fella—if the other fella got twelve months he might get off with six. The law is very just that way.

M'Clippen. I was thinkin' so.

Sergeant (*suspiciously*). Maybe you're thinkin' of informin' on someone yourself?

M'Clippen (*carelessly*). Me! Oh, no. I have

nothin' to inform about. But maybe this dacent man (*He indicates Canatt, who is lookin' very uncomfortable*) has something he could tell.

Canatt. Arrah, what would I have to inform about?

M'Clippen. Search your conscience, and maybe you'll find something that'll give the Sergeant a lift.

Catherine. Musha, how would he come across anything like that?

Canatt. How would I, indeed? Me that hardly ever goes a mile from my own house.

Sergeant. I didn't expect you would. I never expect anything decent in the criminal line down here. (*To Catherine*). Is the rain over ma'am?

(*Catherine looks out*).

Catherine. It's not rainin' a drop now, and the stars are shinin'.

Sergeant. If so I'd better be getting back to the barrack. (*He rises and goes to the door*). Well, good-night to you all.

Catherine. Good-night, Sergeant.

Canatt. Good-night, an' safe home.

M'Clippen. Good-night, Sergeant.

(*The Sergeant goes out and Catherine closes the door*).

M'Clippen (*to Canatt*). Why didn't you tell him about the coins an' aise your conscience?

Canatt. Ah, sure, I was only joking about tellin' the police.

M'Clippen. I know you're a funny ould fellow, but I think I'd better be on the safe side, and burn the box anyhow. (*He moves towards the fire*).

Canatt. Don't burn it, an' I'll promise never to tell. Me word is as good as me bond.

M'Clippen. That's not much of a recommendation for either of them.

Canatt. I'll give you ten shillings for it.

M'Clippen. Ten shillings! Why, man that's only four half-crowns.

Canatt. Well, fifteen.

M'Clippen. That's only six. Make it a sovereign and I'll lave the box with you.

Catherine. Don't make a fool of yourself, John. Have no truck with the likes: it's neither good nor lucky.

M'Clippen. The directions an' everything that's wanted is inside. (*He taps the box*).

Canatt. How much could I make with what's in it?

Catherine (*ironically*). You could make as much as you made out of the false coin the foxy man gave you in the price of the cattle at the fair of Cross.

Canatt (*nettled*). I wish you wouldn't be so fond of castin' up. I admit I was done there, but this is different.

M'Clippen (*rubbing his chin*). Let me see now. You could make a couple of hundred like the one I gave you.

Canatt. Well, I'll give you the sovereign if you show me how it's done.

M'Clippen. Hand over the quid and the saycret is yours.

Canatt. If you wait a minute I'll get it in the bedroom.

Catherine. You just stay here and I'll get it.

(*She takes a box of matches from the dresser and goes into the room, closing the door behind her. M'Clippen takes from his pocket a piece of paper and a stumpy pencil and sits down at the table to write*).

M'Clippen. I'm just writin' a few more directions for you.

(*He writes a few words laboriously following the motion of the pen with his tongue. Canatt edges nearer to see what he is writing*).

M'Clippen. You're not entitled to see them until the money is paid.

(*He folds up the paper and quickly inserts it under the lid of the box. Catherine comes out of the room*).

Catherine. There now (*She hands him a coin*) that's the sovereign.

M'Clippen (*spitting on it for luck and slipping it into his waistcoat pocket*). More power to you. An' now if you lend me one of your own half-crowns I'll show you how I make money.

Canatt. There's one within, I think, Catherine.

(*She returns to the room, taking the matches with her again and closing the door*).

M'Clippen (*standing over the candle at the table, and pointing to the fireplace*): Isn't there a great draught up the chimney?

(*Canatt turns his head to look, and as he does so M'Clippen snuffs out the candle with his fingers*).

M'Clippen. There's the candle out now—have you a match?

Canatt (*raising his voice*). Catherine! come here with the matches, the candle is out.

Catherine (*within*). All right, I'm comin'.

(*She comes out carrying a lighted candle. The street door stands open and the tinker is nowhere to be seen*).

Canatt. Am dam, but he's gone! (*He rushes to the door and looks out*). Black as soot! Might as well try to find a flea in an inkbottle.

Catherine. Well, aren't you the right ould *gom* to let him out like that.

Canatt. I never thought he was goin'. (*He sees the box on the table*). He left us the box anyway.

Catherine. Well, see what's in it, then.

(*Canatt opens the box and disgustedly lifts out a bathbrick*).

Canatt. A bathbrick by the mortal potstick!

Catherine. Well, I declare. (*She sees the scrap of paper and takes it up*). What's this? (*She reads*):—"Directions: To make bright half-crowns use the bathbrick and rub hard." Well, if that doesn't take out! I knew he was goin' to trick you all the time an' I just let him—to teach you a lesson. (*She surveys the table*). Ah, well, sure we had a good tea, the makin's of a breakfast, a bathbrick and a box that'll hold geraniums out of him anyhow.

Canatt. It's not much for a sovereign.

Catherine. D'ye mind the bad sovereign the foxy man passed on you?

Canatt. You don't give me much chance to forget it.

Catherine. Well, you can forget it *now*, for that's it the tinker has.

(*Canatt looks at her for a moment in astonishment and then his face breaks into a smile*).

'Sham'

CURTAIN.

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Author Armour, A.S

Accession No. 1828

Call No. 822.33 M62A

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A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

BERNARD DUFFY

DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS LIMITED
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CHARACTERS:

ALOYSIUS KINSELLA.

NORA KINSELLA ..... *His Niece*

JOE HEGARTY.

MRS. MULVEY.

MRS. HEGARTY ..... *Joe's Mother*

Scene ..... KINSELLA'S SHOP

Time ..... THE PRESENT DAY

The Counter=Charm

The scene is laid in Kinsella's shop. There is a counter at the back, and behind it shelves packed with groceries. The street-door is on the left and on the right is the door of the kitchen parlour. There is a chair near the counter. Nora Kinsella—a girl of twenty—is putting some packets of tea on a shelf as the curtain goes up. She turns towards the parlour door.

Nora (*calling*). Uncle! (*A pause*). Uncle!!

(*Aloysius Kinsella appears at the parlour door. He is a man of about fifty with a very abstracted manner. His hair is untidy and he wears spectacles on the end of his nose. He carries a few sheets of paper and has the air of one interrupted at his work and anxious to get back to it*).

Kinsella. Yes, my dear. What is it?

Nora (*coaxingly*). Would you like to mind the shop until I see to the tea things?

Kinsella. I would not. I'm writin' a ballad that must be finished this evenin'. The fair will be next Tuesday and all the ballad-singers will be looking for something new; they'll lose faith in me if I can't supply them.

Nora. But, Uncle, you can be working at it here.

Kinsella. Ah, now, child, you know that's out of the question. How could a man write poetry with people interruptin' him every minute for pounds of soap an' tea an' candles, an' may be wantin' rashers cut! They're not the sort of things that'll tune a mind for song.

Nora. If I hear anyone annoying you, I'll come out and save you. Just stay a few minutes, Uncle, and I'll hurry with the tea things.

Kinsella. — All right, I'll stay, but I know I'll have no peace at all.

(*She goes into the parlour and he gets behind the counter on which he spreads his papers. He wets his pencil and begins to write laboriously. Joe enters from the street, whistling. He stops short on seeing the poet*).

Joe. That's a fine evenin', Mr. Kinsella.

Kinsella (*absently*). Yes, Joseph. I suppose so—I didn't notice.

Joe. It looks like keepin' fine, too.

Kinsella. I don't doubt that it does, indeed. (*He writes another line*).

Joe. I wanted a—a—box of matches. (*He looks round to see whether Nora is coming*). But I see you're busy. I'll come back again.

Kinsella. Yes, Joe, that's a good boy; come back again.

(*He goes on writing, and Joe turns to go as Mrs. Mulvey, a red-faced woman with a touch of the virago about her, enters from the street*).

Mrs. M. (*to Joe*). Well, Mr. Impidence, are you lookin' for the essence of tulips to cure your heartache?

Joe. I'm not asking anything from you, ma'am.

Mrs. M. No, me lad, I'm not your style.

(*He goes out and shuts the door*).

Mrs. M. (*nodding after him*). That's a boyo! (*She sits down*). I suppose now he pretended he had some business in here?

Kinsella. I think he wanted a box of matches.

Mrs. M. Arrah, don't mind him—the sort of match he's lookin' for is not put up in boxes. (*She fans herself with her apron*). Do you know I'm as wake as water with the goin' over I'm after gettin'. It's a poor thing, Mr. Kinsella, when a lone widda can't pass through the streets of her own town without havin' the hard word thrown at her. That ould targer at the corner hardly ever lets me pass without havin' a fling at me. This very day, an' me intendin' to pass by her door without a word, she pops out her head, and sez she: "It'd fit you better," sez

she, "than gosterin' in Kinsella's shop to go home an' wash your dirty face."

Kinsella. And did you ma'am?

Mrs. M. (*bridling*). Did I what?

Kinsella. Did you pass by without a word?

Mrs. M. I did not. I turned to her calm as you please an' sez I: "When *my* face is washed it's clane—not like some," sez I; "for," sez I, "if you were boiled in soap from this till Tibb's Eve, you'd be just as sooty, for it's bred in the bone. You know her ould father was a sweep as black as the Earl of Hell's waistcoat."

Kinsella. I suppose that ended the matter?

Mrs. M. Aye, until the next time. It's as much as me character is worth to come in here at all.

Kinsella. It's a pity you risk it, ma'am.

Mrs. M. Ah sure, if I didn't come in here, I'd pine away an' die of loneliness.

Kinsella. You couldn't tell that until you'd try.

Mrs. M. Ah, you don't know what it is to be alone.

Kinsella (*wearily*). No, indeed; but sometimes I wish I did.

Mrs. M. I used to think that way often, when Flynn was alive. But I won't reflect on him now. He had the finest funeral that left the street in the memory of man (though I hadn't the pleasure of bein' at it meself—bein'

laid up at the time) and even if he wasn't all he should be, he has his reward now.

Kinsella. I'm sure he deserved it—he must have gone through a lot.

Mrs. M. He went through a fortune; he was a divil for gamblin' on horses and cards, and the like. Sure, that was the breakin' of me heart and the scatterin' of me few half-pence! If ever I was to marry again——

Kinsella (*interrupting, hastily*). But surely you wouldn't?

Mrs. M. (*coyly twisting her apron*). Ah sure, I don't know that I wouldn't, if I got the right sort of a man.

Kinsella. That's hardly likely, ma'am.

Mrs. M. You never know. It's a wonder now you never got married yourself—you'd make a nice quiet husband for any woman.

Kinsella. That's where you're mistaken, ma'am. I have a terrible temper when I'm roused—something shockin'!

Mrs. M. Ah, sure a man's no good that hasn't a bit of a temper.

Kinsella. Ah, but not one like mine—I do be ashamed of the way I go on sometimes.

Mrs. M. You'd soon get over that if you had a wife that'd see that you were comfortable.

Kinsella. I'm really very comfortable as I am.

Mrs. M. (*contemptuously*). Yerra! that

young one doesn't know how to make a man comfortable—what you want is a woman of experience.

Kinsella (*with a touch of asperity*). What I want ma'am is peace, and (*with a sigh*) I don't seem to be likely to get that. A poet, ma'am, needs more tranquility, so to speak, than an ordinary person.

Mrs. M. I may tell you that no one understands the needs of a poet better than I do. D'ye mind ould Jamesey Farrell the pedlar, that used to write all the pomes in the "*Poet's Corner*" in the "*Constitution*"?

Kinsella (*contemptuously*). Indeed I do. And a nice lot they were.

Mrs. M. Well, he lodged in our house for years; and I was at his elbow many a time when he was writin' them.

Kinsella. I never knew how to account for their quality till now, ma'am.

Mrs. M. (*simpering*). Ah, yes; he used to say that I was like a ray of sunshine in the house.

Kinsella. He had a poet's licence, ma'am.

Mrs. M. I don't know about that, but he had a Pedlar's Licence, an' I suppose that did for both the ballads and the knick-nacks. He was a powerful clever man, anyhow. His name you know, is on the tuppenny Book of St. Columcille's Prophecies.

Kinsella (*wearily*). Yes, I believe he wrote some prophecies for the Saint himself.

Mrs. M. But, sure, the Saint was long before his time?

Kinsella (*drily*). About fourteen hundred years, ma'am.

Mrs. M. Well, wasn't he the right ould villain to be tellin' lies on the poor saint like that! He didn't make much of it anyhow—not like you that has the ballad-singers of the four provinces buying your pomes, an' you turnin' them out as easy as kiss your hand. (*She eyes the papers on the counter*). I suppose now you have your latest on them sheets?

Kinsella. Yes, a Temperance ballad—to fall in with the great wave of total abstinence that is sweepin' over the country. (*He taps the papers.*) This will please the Reformers and them that has been—ah—teetotalised, and it won't hurt the feelins of them that still believe in—in lubrication.

Mrs. M. It'd take a quare sort of verse to do that. But if anyone could do it it's yourself. Maybe you'd have no objection to me readin' a bit of it. I used to be mad about poetry. When Jamesey Farrell used to be writin' I'd never give him peace until he'd let me read his latest.

Kinsella. I'd do anything for peace meself, ma'am. (*He hands her a sheet*). That's all I've got done.

Mrs. M. (*as she looks over the paper*). You're a lovely writer! (*She reads slowly*): —

"I was a bould teetotaller
For three long weeks—an' more.
The neighbours all respected me,
An' dacent clothes I wore.

It wasn't the men from Cooley
Nor the boys from Ballybay,
But dealin' men from Crossmaglen
Put whiskey in my tay!"

Well now, weren't you clever to be able to put that together, an' you attendin' the shop an' everything!

Kinsella. I really find it very hard to do anything here, ma'am. People come in and interrupt me, you know. But Nora will be out presently, and I'll be able to have peace, then, I hope.

Mrs. M. Ah, but what'll you do when she leaves you? By the way I see her laughin' an' goin' on, she'll not be long with you. She's——

(*Nora appears at the door and Mrs. M. stops short*).

Kinsella. Ah, here she is. Nora, my dear, will you attend to Mrs. Mulvey, while I get back to my work. Good evenin', ma'am. (*He hurries into the parlour*).

Mrs. M. (*calling after him*). I'll see you on my way back an' tell you about it.

(*Kinsella closes the door. Nora goes behind the counter*).

Mrs. M. Your uncle seems to be very busy this evenin'.

Nora. Yes, and I think he's not pleased at bein' disturbed.

Mrs. M. (*haughtily*). There's a kind of a cut in that remark, miss!

Nora. Well, if the cap fits——

Mrs. M. It does *not* fit, and I'd teach you manners, madam, if I was mistress in this house.

Nora. That's hardly likely to happen, thank goodness.

Mrs. M. Don't be too sure of that, me lady. If I was to tell you the conversation me an' your uncle is after havin' it might open your eyes a bit.

Nora (*coldly*). I don't want to hear it.

Mrs. M. No, of course, not—you wouldn't like it.

Nora. Is there anything you want, ma'am? I have a good deal to do.

Mrs. M. That's a hint for me to go, I suppose?

Nora. Well, I don't think it's fair for a person to stay so long in the shop—it keeps the *customers* out.

Mrs. M. Yes, customers like that young spark across the road. If I had my way, I'd put a

kick in that fella's gallop. I'm goin' now, but as soon as I do me little messages, I'll be back to finish me chat with your uncle—I promised him.

Nora. You mean you threatened him.

Mrs. M. I'll tell him the sort of a brazen whipster he has for a niece when I come back.

(*She goes out and Nora begins to arrange things behind the counter. Joe enters*).

Joe. I was waitin' for her to go. I hate the sight of that ould one!

Nora. I don't love it much myself, Joe, and I wish she wouldn't be comin' in here annoyin' my uncle.

Joe. I believe she's settin' her cap at him, Nora. She's a right ould faggot that one, and I wouldn't trust her as far as I could throw her.

Nora. But surely you don't think *he* has any fancy for her?

Joe (*dubiously*). I dunno; she spends a lot of time in here, and they say a man'll get used to nearly anything. She might hook him before he'd know where he was.

Nora. Lord preserve us! that'd be an awful thing to happen.

Joe (*philosophically*). Sure he'll have to put in his *purgatory* some time.

Nora. Yes, but I wouldn't like to see him putting it in on earth. Of course, Joe, I'd like

to see him married, for as I've often told you, I couldn't bear to leave him alone with no one to take care of him.

Joe (*gloomily*). Aye, an' if he doesn't get married, it strikes me you an' I'll be gettin' the Old Age Pension before we can get married ourselves.

Nora. I wish he'd take a fancy to some nice, motherly person that'd understand him.

Joe. I wish he would.

Nora (*brightening*). I say, Joe, wouldn't it be grand if we could get him tied to your mother. I think he has a fancy for her. The other day he was sitting at the window pretending to be readin' the newspaper—and it upside down—while all the time he was watching her at the roses in the front garden.

Joe (*eagerly*). An' I know mother thinks a lot of him. She buys all the ballads he writes from the ballad-singers in the Market Square.

Nora. At a penny a piece! And she could get them here wholesale at fourpence a dozen.

Joe. That just shows you! (*He scratches his head reflectively*). I wonder would there be any way of bringin' them up to the scratch?

Nora. If we could even get her to come in here oftener, and be friendly with him. At any rate she'd be a counter-charm to Mrs. Mulvey and the likes of her.

Joe. D'ye think we could——?

(*Kinsella opens the parlour door and peers out cautiously*).

Kinsella. Is she gone?

Nora. Yes, uncle, she's gone, but she's coming back.

Kinsella. Oh dear, oh dear, isn't it a poor thing for a poet, when the rhymin' is on him, to have no peace at all—not even in the four walls of his own house. I can't stand the chatter of these women. I wish we could make a rule like some of the big public-houses in the city, that no ladies would be admitted.

Joe. There's one way of keepin' them from annoyin' you, Mr. Kinsella.

Kinsella. An' what is that, Joe?

Joe. Marry one of them—say Mrs. Mulvey—and then you'll be safe from all the others.

Kinsella. Joseph, your advice puts me in mind of an old song I used to hear in my young days:

"There was a man all in a cart
An' he was going for to be hanged
When a messenger came ridin' up
An' ordered for the cart to stand."

To make a long story short: the messenger said that a pardon would be granted to the condemned man, if he married a certain woman—who must have been rather like Mrs. Mulvey,

from what we can gather. When the man heard the terms he said:

"The bargain's bad in every part;
The wife's the worst—drive on the cart!"

An' that's the way I feel about Mrs. Mulvey—God forgive me for bein' so uncharitable.

Joe. Then the best thing you can do is to get married to someone else—then *she'll* keep away.

Kinsella. Ah, Joe, you'll never dance at my weddin'—it's too late now.

Joe. You never know.

Kinsella. But I do know. I settled the future for myself some time ago, and I'm not likely to go back on it now—my courtin' days are over. And that's the reason that the conversation of these ladies doesn't touch me. Couldn't you hint to Mrs. Mulvey, Nora, that it's not a proper—nor a delicate thing—for a lady to be seen so much here?

Nora. I've done my best, uncle, but it's no use. Couldn't you give her the cold shoulder yourself?

Joe (*gloomily*). If he did maybe she'd lay her head on it—to warm it.

Kinsella. If she was told that I had a contagious disease—would that do, do you think?

Nora. She'd want to nurse you out of it, likely.

Kinsella (*to Joe*). You're a smart boy, Joe. Can't you think of some way to get rid of her?

Joe. I think the best thing you can do is to get some outsider to speak to her quietly, an' tell her that she's the talk of the parish, and that Father Mulligan'll be down on her if she doesn't mind herself.

Kinsella. There's something in that. But who'd have the courage to do it—that's the question?

Joe. I think my mother would, d'ye know?

Kinsella (*eagerly*). D'ye think would she?

Joe. I'll slip over an' ask her anyhow. (*He hurries out*).

Kinsella. That's a good boy, Nora.

Nora (*demurely*). Yes, uncle.

Kinsella. He's getting on well, I believe?

Nora. Yes, uncle.

Kinsella. Very steady lad, too, I'm told.

Nora. Yes, uncle

Kinsella. Did he get that box of matches he wanted?

Nora. No uncle, he must have forgotten it.

Kinsella. Ah, I don't blame him. I mind at his age buyin' a box of matches every evenin' in the same shop for six months.

Nora. You must have smoked a lot then, uncle.

Kinsella. I didn't smoke at all, my dear; but they were the cheapest excuse I could get for talkin' to the girl behind the counter.

(*Mrs. Hegarty and Joe enter from the street*).

Kinsella. Ah, good evenin', ma'am.

Mrs. H. Lovely evenin' indeed. How are you, Nora?

Nora. I'm very well, thanks; but my uncle is a bit upset—I suppose Joe has told you.

Mrs. H. Yes, and I can understand his feelin's about that angel's visits.

Nora. She hinted a few minutes ago that she intended to be mistress here.

Mrs. H. Well, the cheek of her!

Kinsella. I really never gave her any encouragement to think that. Of course I've read out a few of my poems to her——

Nora. But sure, uncle, you'll do that to anyone that'll listen to you.

Kinsella. Ah yes, indeed, that's true.

Mrs. H. (*smiling*). Was there anything about love in the ones you read to her?

Kinsella (*thinking*). Let me see now. Yes; there was one that was a trifle sentimental.

Joe. As sure as a gun she'll say you meant her.

Kinsella. But the lady in that poem was likened to the dawn. Surely she couldn't say that was meant for herself?

Joe. Couldn't she? I've seen dawns that were just as red and fiery-lookin' as she is.

Nora. Whatever she thinks, what we want to do is to keep her from comin' in here.

Mrs. H. And do you think if I spoke to her as a candid friend?

Kinsella. Ah, you needn't be as hard on her as that. Just advise her—tell her people are talkin' about her. That'll be perfectly true, for aren't *we* all talking about her now.

(*Joe goes to the door and looks out*).

Nora. But don't say it's only us.

Joe. Here she's comin' back!

Nora. Uncle, you and Joe had better go inside for a while.

Joe. I don't want to be here when she comes anyhow.

Kinsella. Neither do I indeed.

(*Kinsella and Joe go into the parlour*).

Nora (*to Mrs. Hegarty*). Now don't be afraid to rub it in to her.

(*Mrs. Mulvey enters*).

Mrs. M. (*to Mrs. H.*). Good evenin', ma'am. That's grand weather, glory be to God.

Mrs. H. Yes, indeed, if it lasts.

Mrs. M. (*sitting down*). Ah, well, if it doesn't we can't help it.

Nora (*to Mrs. M.*). What can I get for you, ma'am?

Mrs. M. Ah, I'm time enough when Mrs. Hegarty is served.

Mrs. H. You needn't wait on me, ma'am. I only dropped in for a chat.

Mrs. M. To tell you the truth, I'm in the same boat myself; though it's little time I have for chattin' or gossipin'.

Mrs. H. That's not the story that's goin' the rounds.

Mrs. M. (*coldly*). An' what, may I ask, *is* the story, ma'am?

Mrs. H. Well, people are saying that you spend more of your time in this shop than you do in your own house.

Mrs. M. Then, I may tell you, that a greater lie never left a Christian's mouth.

Mrs. H. Ah, sure, I do see you myself from my own window.

Mrs. M. They say the hungry eye sees far.

Mrs. H. And I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself to have people talkin' the way they are.

Mrs. M. (*standing up*). An' who, might I ask, has given you the right to speak to me in that tone of voice?

Nora. If you want to know, my uncle has given her the right.

Mrs. M. (*astounded*). He, what!

Nora. You heard what I said well enough.

Mrs. M. I heard it, but I don't believe it.

Nora. Believe it or not, it's true.

Mrs. M. Well, isn't he the right ould deluderer; an' the way he was talkin' to me the

same as if I was the apple of his eye! (*To Mrs. H.*) An' I suppose you're as proud as *Punch*, now that you've gained your ends.

Nora. It's easy seein' that you're jealous, ma'am.

Mrs. M. (*disdainfully*). Me, jealous! I wouldn't have been seen dead in the same street with the ould Gazebo. (*To Mrs. H.*). I suppose he'll make you mind the shop while he's writin' his ould ballads for the riff-raff of the world to be singin' them. I wish you luck of your job. (*To Nora*). Where is the ould *gom* himself?

Nora. He's within, and he doesn't want to be disturbed.

Mrs. M. (*calling loudly*). Mr. Kinsella!

(*Kinsella appears at the parlour door looking very timid*).

Mrs. M. (*to Kinsella*). Ah, there y'are, me hero. I believe I have to offer you my sympathy.

Kinsella (*mildy*). Thank you, ma'am.

(*He comes into the shop—followed by Joe*).

Mrs. M. I must say I thought you had better taste, for what you can see in her ladyship here, is more than I can tell. Of course, I always knew that your sight was bad, but I never knew it was as bad as that.

Kinsella. One of my eyes is as good as new, ma'am.

Mrs. M. Faith then, she must have kept on

the blind side of you. Man, dear, but you kept it very quiet! I suppose you didn't let it out, afraid the people'd be laughin' at you. But it won't be long until it's known, for I'm the very girl that'll spread the news. (*She moves to the door*). There's not a man, woman, or child in the place that won't be enjoyin' the joke before dark, me pair of mildewed ould turtle doves!

(*She goes out laughing ironically. The others look at each other in consternation*).

Joe. She'll do it, too.

Mrs. H. I never thought she'd put that construction on it!

Kinsella. It's very awkward indeed. I wonder what we can do.

Joe. You'll never be able to stop her talkin'.

Nora. And everyone else will be talkin', too.

Kinsella. We'll have to do something.

Joe. Supposin' we gave it out that Nora and I were engaged? We wouldn't mind, would we, Nora?

Nora. Not if it'd stop the talk.

Joe. You see then people'd think that Mrs. Mulvey had the wrong end of the stick and that it was me an' Nora all the time!

Mrs. H. But, then the people would be talkin' about you.

Joe. Ah, sure, we wouldn't care.

Kinsella. Yes, but if they went on talkin' long enough, you might have to make it good.

Joe. We would, I suppose, but we'd put up with that for your sake an' my mother's.

(*Nora nods in agreement*).

Kinsella (*smiling*). It'd hardly be fair to ask them to sacrifice themselves for us—would it, ma'am?

Mrs. H. Indeed it wouldn't, and it'd do no good, for Mrs. Mulvey would come back again.

Kinsella. An' I'd be alone at her mercy, and then I'd be worse off than ever.

Nora. But, whisper, uncle, there's another way to stop the talk and keep Mrs. Mulvey out. (*She pulls down her uncle's head and whispers in his ear*).

Kinsella (*smiling*). Yes, yes, of course. How well you didn't think of that first! (*To Mrs. H. and Joe*). Nora says that the best way out is to make Mrs. Mulvey's story true. (*He holds out his hand to Mrs. H.*). What do you say?

Mrs. H. (*placing her hand in his*). I suppose it *is* the best way.

Nora (*slyly*). I thought, uncle, we'd never dance at your wedding?

Kinsella. That's perfectly true, my dear, for, as a matter of fact, we were married quietly a month ago, and we hadn't the courage to tell you till now.

Joe (*disgustedly*). An' we were tryin' to bring them up to the scratch!

CURTAIN.

Title Mid Summer Night's Dream

Author Harrold, A. S

Accession No. 1828

Call No. 822.33 M16 A

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date
P.G. Nagpur			
1925	10/12/58		

THE OLD LADY

A Comedy in One Act

BY

BERNARD DUFFY

DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS LIMITED
85 TALBOT STREET
1921

Title Mid Summer Night's Dream

Author Armour, A. S

Accession No. 1828

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THE OLD LADY

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

Title Mid Summer Nights Dream

Author Armour, A.S

Accession No. 1828

Call No. 822.33 M62A

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THE OLD LADY

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

BERNARD DUFFY

DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS LIMITED
85 TALBOT STREET
1921

CHARACTERS:

JOHN FITZPATRICK ..... *A Young Professor*

CHARLES RENFIELD ..... *His Friend*

LOLA FULTON ..... *A Musical Comedy "Star"*

MRS. FITZPATRICK ..... *John's Mother*

A SERVANT.

Scene ..... FITZPATRICK'S LODGINGS

Time ..... THE PRESENT DAY

The Old Lady

The scene is laid in the sitting-room at Fitzpatrick's lodgings. There is a door at the back, a window on the right and a fire-place on the left in which a fire is burning. Renfield is seated in an armchair in front of the fire, reading the morning paper. Fitzpatrick is at the table in the middle of the room opening and reading letters. He opens the last one and as he reads it his face expresses surprise and disgust. He brushes the hair back from his forehead nervously.

Fitzpatrick. Good Lord! I'm in for it now!

Renfield (*looking up from the paper*). In for what?

Fitzpatrick. This letter is from Lola Fulton.

Renfield. Advising, I presume, you to be a good little boy and not to worry her.

Fitzpatrick. No: it's a thousand times worse than that.

Renfield (*with mock tragedy*). Don't tell me that she's going to have you.

Fitzpatrick (*gloomily*). I'm going to be *had* by her, sure enough. She says that if I don't marry her, she won't take less than a thousand to keep the matter out of court.

Renfield. Do you mean to tell me, young man, that you actually proposed to her?

Fitzpatrick. I—I—think I did—one evening.

Renfield (*ironically*). Only *one* evening!

Fitzpatrick. That's all I'm clear about—but you know I wasn't quite myself on a few of those nights at the theatre.

Renfield. I'd be sorry to think you were. But to resume: How many letters did you write to her?

Fitzpatrick. About a dozen, I think.

Renfield. Then your number is up. Are you anxious to marry her?

Fitzpatrick. I'm not. Do you think I'm a fool?

Renfield. You were, you know.

Fitzpatrick. I know I was. But I'm not now.

Renfield. Then I suppose you'll let her have the money.

Fitzpatrick. The devil of it is, I can't. I have about £1,200 saved and I need every penny of it.

Renfield. Then there's nothing for it but to let it go into court. After all, you're not a peer, and she's no chicken, so you may get off lightly enough.

Fitzpatrick. Man, I could not let it go to law. Think of all the "slush" I wrote to her

read out to an audience consisting of as many of my friends and enemies as could squeeze themselves into the court.

Renfield. Yes, and then there's the headlines in the newspapers: "The Amorous Astronomer", "The Scientist and the Star," and so forth.

Fitzpatrick. You needn't rub it in—I can imagine it all. But surely there's some other way out of it?

Renfield. Could you not let her have the money?

Fitzpatrick. I can't. I need it all to carry out a plan that will make someone—my mother, in fact—very happy.

Renfield. That settles it.

Fitzpatrick. And then there's—there's a girl.

Renfield. What! another?

Fitzpatrick. The other. I intended to ask her to marry me when I got this professorship. But when I went to London and was dazzled by the "Star" I somehow lost my balance. Since I came back I haven't had the courage either to see her or write to her.

Renfield. Seems to me that you haven't been quite playing the game.

Fitzpatrick. No, I've been a cad, and it doesn't make me any happier to realize that fact. I thought that when I got back here to

Dublin, and had, so to speak, turned over a new leaf, that I might be able to forget that flutter in London, and start as a self-respecting citizen once more. But here this Fulton woman turns up, as I might say, on my doorstep.

Renfield. Oh, it's not quite as bad as that; she's a long way off still.

Fitz. No, she's not; she's here in Dublin playing in a *Revue.* And, what's worse, she says in this letter that she intends to call on me this morning.

Renfield. What! here?

Fitzpatrick. Yes, this identical spot. I may as well see her. There's no use in prolonging the agony. Besides, if I shirked her now, I'd probably run up against her in the streets and all Dublin might get to know of it. (*He takes out his watch*). Twelve o'clock almost. She may be here any minute now.

Renfield. What do you propose to do?

Fitzpatrick. Throw myself on her mercy, I suppose.

Renfield. That'd never do with Lola. Better play your cards carefully and see whether you can't find some flaw in her game.

Fitzpatrick. Oh, I'm no good at that sort of thing. I wish I could delegate you to do the dirty work. (*He moves to the door*). I'd better go up and shave. Think over the thing and

perhaps by the time I come down you'll have evolved some plan.

Renfield. Hanged if I can see any light at present.

Fitz. Think it over anyhow, like a good chap. Here's her letter if that will help you. (*He hands the letter to Renfield and going to the door, opens it*). I'll not be long.

(*He goes out and closes the door. Renfield reads the letter, nodding thoughtfully as he does so. There is a knock at the door*).

Renfield. Come in.

(*The maid enters*).

Maid. There's a lady downstairs to see Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Renfield. Show her up, Katie. Mr. Fitzpatrick will be down shortly.

(*The maid goes out and Renfield folds up the letter, and puts it into his pocket. The maid returns and ushers in Miss Lola Fulton, a very loud young lady, highly coloured and flashily dressed. She wears a directoire dress split almost to the knee, and she carries a large muff.*)

Lola (*in surprise*). Hullo, Charley, you here!

Renfield. Yes, I came over from London with Fitzpatrick, and I am staying here with him. He's upstairs, shaving.

Lola. Making himself pretty for me, I suppose! He expects me, you know. (*She sits down*).

Renfield. Yes, he told me.

Lola. And did the woolly lamb tell you why I was coming?

Renfield. I understood that you were coming to fleece him.

Lola. Oh, not to fleece him—merely to trim him a little: a thousand or so.

Renfield. I think that would leave him pretty well short. But seriously, Lola, you don't expect him to "part" simply because he was infatuated with you for a week or two. To my knowledge dozens of chaps have made just as big fools of themselves about you as he did.

Lola. Yes, dear boy, but the other fools didn't write the same kind of letters. (*She takes from her muff a bundle of letters tied with a broad green ribbon*). This is his collection—they'd amuse you, Charley. You see the green ribbon—that's symbolic. (*She replaces the packet in muff*).

Renfield. Pretty idea! But look here, Lola, admitted that the chap was a fool——

Lola. Not *was*, Charley, *is*.

Renfield. Oh, he's not as big a fool as he was.

Lola. Has he lost weight fretting then?

Renfield. He's sober now. You know when he was hanging around the theatre he wasn't altogether responsible for his actions, otherwise he'd never have made such an ass of himself about you.

Lola. You're not very complimentary, old cheeze-cake. But that doesn't alter the situation. I'm going to teach this young man not to trifle with young and tender affections.

Renfield (*laughing*). Oh, come now, Lola. "Young and tender affections" is a bit too thick. Surely you don't expect me to believe that (*He affects the manner of the melodrama*) your hear—r—r—t is a—broken?

Lola. No, Charley, you wouldn't believe it; but a jury of sentimental Irishmen will. And I've told this young man plump and plain that if he doesn't make good his offer of marriage he'll have to pay up.

Renfield. Suppose he decides to make it good?

Lola. I have no such hopes.

Renfield. Hopes! Fears, you mean.

Lola. I am quite sure, from his conduct, that he hasn't any such intention.

Renfield. But supposing he has—it's not outside the bonds of possibility—what then?

Lola (*after a little thought*). Well, you know, I'd be half inclined to take him—for spite. Besides, I need a rest from the boards.

Renfield. You'd soon tire of the quiet life you'd have to lead here.

Lola. Yes, probably I should; but then I could get a "shop" any time and go back to the boards again.

Renfield (*baffled*). Hang it, you leave the poor devil no way of escape—it's not fair.

Lola (*turning on him fiercely*). It's not fair, isn't it! You stand up there making excuses for your precious friend with your cynical smile, and try to teach me what's fair and what's not. You know the sort of a life I lead. You know that I have to work hard for my living. Day in and day out I have to slave at these rotten *Revues* so that I may command the necessary "fascination." I have to smile whether I want to or not. The manager pays me to smile across the footlights at the things that sit in the stalls reeking with tobacco smoke and strong drink, and after the show some nincompoop will pay me with a supper to smile at him across a restaurant table. If he gave the same attention to one of his own set he knows he'd be taken seriously, but because I'm an actress I'm expected to have no feelings and to let his attentions run off me like water off a duck's back. If a man comes along whom an actress is fool enough to care about, she may go and break her silly heart if she likes, for the chances are she'll find that his intentions are

neither serious nor honourable. I'm sick of the whole thing. I want a rest from it and I'm going to have it. Some time ago I made up my mind that if I ever got the chance of making one of these gilded popinjays pay for his philandering I'd take it. I've got one now and I'll make the most of it.

Renfield. But hang it, Lola, Fitzpatrick is not on an level with the popinjays. He's a thoroughly decent chap and means well. I'll admit that while he was on that burst in London he acted like a fool. But it's rather hard that he should suffer just because you've got your back up against the rotters.

Lola. Pah! what's one fool to me more than another? Your friend happens to come first to my hand, and I'm going to squeeze the gold out of him.

(*There's a knock at the door*).

Renfield. Come in.

(*Servant enters*).

Servant. Mrs. Fitzpatrick is downstairs, sir.

Renfield. Oh, Lord!

Lola (*in surprise*). Mrs. Fitzpatrick?

Servant. Mr. Fitzpatrick's mother, Miss. Shall I show her up here, sir?

Renfield (*hesitating*). Er—er—um—yes, show her up.

(*Servant goes out*).

Renfield. Look here, Lola. This is pretty awkward. Suppose you and I slip out now before the old lady comes up? You can come back to-morrow or next day.

Lola. Not if I know it, Charley. I want to see what sort of mother-in-law I may have.

Renfield. Well, don't give the show away on the poor chap for the present—say you're a friend of mine.

Lola. I'll say whatever suits my purpose, my boy. I may be able to work the old geezer to further my ends. I know these old swells from the country—silk dresses, and the grand manner. (*She puts up imaginary lorgnette and imitates snobbish old lady*). "And who is this —ah—person?"—you know. They always have a holy horror of a scandal in the family. If I play the part of the scandal in this family I shall probably get even more than I expected.

(*Enter Mrs. Fitzpatrick, an old Connaught peasant. She is dressed in the homely fashion of the West and wears a tallied cap and a plaid shawl. She stops on the threshold, confused on seeing the strangers. Lola is dumbfounded with surprise*).

Mrs. F. (*to Lola*). Oh, excuse me, Miss, I thought this was my son's room.

Renfield. You are perfectly right, madam.

This is his room. He is upstairs shaving. My name is Renfield. I am an old friend of John's and I am staying here.

Mrs. F. (*shaking hands with him*). I'm very glad to meet you, for many a time I've heard him speak of you. And I suppose this lady (*she turns towards Lola*) is Mrs. Ren——?

Renfield (*breaking in*). Oh, no. She is still Miss Fulton.

Mrs. F. Well, sure, please goodness, she won't be long so. I'm glad to make your acquaintance too, my dear, and I think it's small wonder that Mr. Renfield took a fancy to you.

Lola (*drily*). It's rather a surprise to me.

Mrs. F. Ah, that's your modesty, darlin'. Sure you'd be any man's fancy this minute with your purty face, and you so beautifully dressed into the bargain—if you'll excuse me remarking it.

Lola. Oh, don't mention it.

Mrs. F. Well, I'll not, then. Only I couldn't help it. You know we seldom see such beautiful dresses where I live—except when the milliners come out from the town. But, sure maybe you're one yourself?

Renfield. Oh, no; Miss Fulton is an *artiste*.

Mrs. F. An artist, is she? Well, think of that now! We do have plenty of artists down our way. (*To Lola*). I suppose you paint a lot, my dear?

Lola. Oh no, not very much.

Renfield. Oh, come now, Lola; you paint a great deal more than you used to.

Mrs. F. I'm sure, *alanna*, you can paint better than some that I've seen. There they'd sit down and daub paint on a bit of canvas for an hour or so, and then they'd get up and talk out of them as if they'd copied down the beauty an' grandeur of the world that was spread before them. I often wondered they weren't ashamed to be telling lies on the handiwork of God.

Renfield. Miss Fulton never paints anything but the human face; but she makes lots of money by doing that.

Mrs. F. D'ye tell me that? I'm sure your mother must be very proud of you, *alanna.*

Lola (*sarcastically*). I don't think.

Mrs. F. You don't think what, my dear?

Renfield. Miss Fulton means just what she says. She doesn't think. It's not everyone that would admit it.

Lola. I mean that I don't think my mother worries very much about me.

Mrs. F. Ah, now, you shouldn't say that. You know, me dear, a mother is always thinkin' about her child from the day it is born until she is laid in the clay herself. An' *your* mother, child, is just the same as another, an' you'll find

that she worries more about you than even this gentleman himself.

Renfield. I'm quite sure that she worries at least as much about Lola as I do.

Mrs. F. There now. It's the same all the world over. Look at me now. Sometimes I get the notion that John's not getting the care he ought to; an' then I have a bee in my bonnet until I get a chance of runnin' up to the city, like to-day, to see how he's getting on.

Lola. He ought to be able to take care of himself by now.

Mrs. F. Ah, sure, young people never know what's good for them.

Renfield. What some of them don't know is not worth knowing.

Mrs. F. Arrah don't be talkin'—what they *do* know is not worth knowin' mostly. There's John, now, an' him a professor an' all an' you'd be surprised at the foolish things he'll do.

Lola. I don't know that *I'd* be surprised.

Mrs. F. Ah, sure most men are the same when they haven't a woman to look after them.

Renfield. I suppose you come up to town often?

Mrs. F. No, then, I don't. I can't like the city. I feel like a fish out of water here. And I often wondered that John could content himself cooped up in these noisy streets, him that

was as wild as a hare as a lad, and had the whole mountain side for a playground.

Renfield. I've heard a lot about that playground from John, and I hope some day to see it.

Mrs. F. Ah, sure it'd hardly suit a fine gentleman like you; for though it's a grand place when the sky is clear and the mountain streams are flashin' in the sun, there are times when it's grey and lonesome. But to them that's born there, there's no place like it. I'm an ould woman myself, worn and feeble, an' still I keep thinkin' of the places I played in as a child—an', mind you, it's a long time since I was a child.

Renfield. Oh, come now, you're young yet.

Mrs. F. Ah, maybe I'm young in heart, but, *avic*, I'm ould in years. You can judge how ould I am when I tell you that it's sixty-five years last August since I started to earn my own living.

Lola. You must have started right from your cradle.

Mrs. F. You might nearly say that, indeed, for I was only ten, alanna. But sure I had to do it when we were evicted.

Lola. Evicted! How do you mean?

Mrs. F. It was after the famine, my dear, when the people had no strength left to work on the land. An' them that couldn't pay their

rent were thrown out on the roadside—for the landlord would rather have ruined homes than no rents. We were among the first to go. I mind it as if it was only yesterday, though I was only a little child at the time, for it's a hard and bitter thing to see the roof you were born under thrown down before your eyes, and your belongings scattered on the road. An', when we went into the town for a night's shelter, because there was fever there, there was no house in the place open an' no livin' soul to be seen in the streets, except one poor family kneelin' outside the closed chapel door, prayin'. Ah, my dear, they were terrible times for the poor.

Lola. But how did you manage afterwards?

Mrs. F. My father and mother had to go to the workhouse, and I think that broke their hearts, for they died there in a very short time. The family were scattered to the four quarters of the world. But God was good to me. I was taken by a kind neighbour and kept until I was able to hire out an' earn my own livin'. So you might say I've been workin' all my life. Not that I regret it, for I think it better to wear out than rust out, but all the same I'm thinkin' of havin' a rest now in the end of my ould days.

Renfield. Strange to say, Miss Fulton was talking of having a rest herself just before you came in.

Mrs. F. (*to Lola*). Tut-tut, my dear, you're too young to talk of resting. You're only at the beginning of your work.

Lola. I shouldn't like to think that.

Mrs. F. You'll find plenty to do yet.

Renfield. Miss Fulton thinks there are very few.

Mrs. F. Very few what, *avic*?

Renfield. Very few "soft things" that she can *do*.

Lola. Don't mind him, Mrs. Fitzpatrick; he's fond of a joke. Of course I like the soft things, but who doesn't?

Mrs. F. Yes, indeed, but we can't all have them. For my own part, I suppose I'd see nothing but hardness to my dying day if I hadn't a clever son.

Renfield. I am sure you are very proud of him.

Mrs. F. To be sure I am. Not that I had much to do with it. It was nothing but exhibitions and scholarships from the start, and his education never cost a penny. But I'm as proud of it as if they'd made myself a professor. (*She gives a little laugh at the idea*). A quare old professor I'd make!

Renfield. I think if there was a Chair of Common Sense you'd fill it very well.

Mrs. F. (*laughing*). Ah, sure I'm a thin ould creature an' I never fill any chair. But then I

needn't shout till I'm out of the wood. Maybe I'll get fat when I'm living like a lady in the grand house John is going to build.

Lola. Is he going to build a house? That looks well.

Mrs. F. Yes, you see he has saved just enough to buy the ould place I was born in, and he's goin' to build a new house on it. And I'm to live in it as grand as you please. An' when he gets married——

Lola. Oh, is he goin' to get married?

Mrs. F. Well, there's a little girl he's been fond of since he was a lad, an' I'm thinkin' it won't be long now until he settles down. An' he's to come down and stay with me in the new house when he's not lecturin'. So you might say it's goin' to be changed times for me. But sure I don't think anyone grudges them to me.

Renfield. I certainly think that you've earned your reward. Miss Fulton will have to work for a few years more before she deserves as much.

Lola. You know, Charley, you're a bit too hard on me.

Mrs. F. Don't mind him, *alanna;* men like to tease. (*To Renfield*). Maybe John is finished cleanin' himself.

Renfield. I'll run up and see.

Mrs. F. Do, *avic.*

(*He goes out*).

Mrs. F. (*confidentially*). I'm just as glad he's gone out, for I notice that one of the seams of your dress is after splittin'. (*She points to the Directoire*). You'll just have time to pin it up before they come in. Maybe he didn't notice it.

Lola (*smiling*). Even if he did, I don't think he'd be very shocked.

Mrs. F. Maybe not, my dear, but it's best to run no chances. (*She takes some pins from her shawl*). Here's a few pins.

Lola (*taking them*). Oh, very well. Anything to oblige a lady. (*She pins up the dress*). Will that do?

Mrs. F. Splendid! No one would notice it now.

Lola (*looking down at the dress half ruefully*). No, indeed, it's quite ordinary now.

(*The door opens and Renfield enters with Fitzpatrick, who looks at Lola with evident uneasiness. He crosses to his mother and kisses her*).

Fitzpatrick. This *is* a surprise, mother. I never expected you.

Mrs. F. There was a cheap excursion on the railway, agra, and so I thought I might as well run up to see how you were gettin' on.

(*Fitzpatrick turns to Lola*).

Lola. How do you do, Mr. Fitzpatrick? I just dropped in for a few minutes.

Fitzpatrick. Sorry I was so long upstairs. I did not know there was anyone here.

Lola. We were entertained by your mother. She has been telling us about you.

Fitzpatrick. I'm afraid mother's goose is a swan.

Lola. If you were really modest you'd reverse that. (*She looks at her wrist-watch*). Good gracious, it's very late. I'm sorry I must be off. Charley is going to escort me down town.

Renfield (*with a bow*). With great pleasure.

Mrs. F. It's a pity you have to leave us so soon.

Fitzpatrick (*nervously*). I suppose we—that is to say I—I suppose I shall see you again.

Lola. No, I don't think so. Oh, by the way (*She takes the packet of letters from her muff*) I nearly forgot. This is a packet of rubbish I want to get rid of. I'll make use of your fire if I may. (*She pitches the packet into the fire*). Well, good-bye, and be a swan—if you can.

(*She shakes hands with him; and he turns and looks into the fire at the burning letters*).

Lola (*to Mrs. F.*) Good-bye, Mrs. Fitzpatrick. I'm very glad I met you.

Mrs. F. (*shaking hands*). Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you.

(*Lola bends forward impulsively and kisses her, and then turns and walks quickly through the door which Renfield holds open for her. Fitzpatrick is still looking into the fire*).

CURTAIN

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Author Armour, A.S

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SPECIAL PLEADING

A Coincidence in One Act

BY

BERNARD DUFFY

DUBLIN
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85 TALBOT STREET
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SPECIAL PLEADING

A COINCIDENCE IN ONE ACT

Title Mid Summer Nights Dream

Author Armour, A.S

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A Coincidence in One Act

BY

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CHARACTERS:

MICHAEL ..... *An Irish Burglar*

JIM ..... *A Cockney Burglar*

MR. CULVERT.

MARY.

Scene ..... THE LIBRARY OF MR. CULVERT'S HOUSE

Time ..... THE PRESENT DAY

Special Pleading

The scene is laid in the library of Mr. Culvert's house which is on the outskirts of a London suburb. The room is tastefully furnished. There are two armchairs in the middle of the stage facing the audience and a small closed Sheraton desk against the right hand wall, above which is a large portrait of a lady. A telephone stands on the desk. There is a door on the right and another on the left. Near the right hand one there is an electric-light switch, and at the back there is a large bow-window across which are drawn heavy curtains.

As the curtain goes up the stage is in darkness. The right-hand door is opened cautiously and Jim enters carrying a dark lantern. He is followed by Michael who carries a small handbag and an empty sack. Jim is a typical cockney with the ironical manner of his class. Michael is a Western Irishman of variable temperament, dreamy, enthusiastic, hot-tempered and humorous by turns. Both are poorly clad. Jim, flashing his lantern around, sees the electric light switch and turns it on.

Jim (*looking about him*). **We may as well start 'ere.**

Michael (*indifferently*). One place is as good as another to me. (*He sits down in an armchair and rests his chin on his hands*).

Jim (*gazing at him indignantly*). 'Ere, wot d'ye think yer doin' may I awsk?

Michael. I'm just thinkin'.

Jim (*caustically*). If yer tike my advice you'll stop thinkin' an' get up on yer 'ind legs and start work. (*Michael ignores this remark and continues to gaze at nothing*).

Michael (*speaking dreamily*). It did me heart good to get away from London this night—out into the country, with the moon shinin' an' the wind hardly whisperin' in the trees.

Jim (*disgustedly*). 'Ere, I sye, if you're goin' to talk poetry I'm off.

Michael (*continuing*). On a night like this in Ireland the fairies would be dancin' round the lone bushes, and playin' their music in the forts.

Jim. Fairies! Well, I'm blowed!

Michael (*turning to him*). You don't believe in fairies, I suppose?

Jim. Wot d'ye tike me for—a bloomin' kid?

Michael. Hardly that, James. But more than kids believes in fairies. I heard the fairy music, myself, one night an' me comin' home across the valley from a spree.

Jim. You 'ad too much whiskey that night.

Michael. No matter what I had, I heard the

music. It was in a fort on a hill and when I got to the top it was down in the hollow on t'other side. I tried to catch up with it, but if I was follyin' it till now, I could get no nearer to it. But I heard it, sure enough.

Jim. You 'ad a bit of a 'ead in the mornin' 'adn't you?

Michael. It wasn't that I tell ye. If it was, it made me hear sweeter music than ever I heard from the hand of man in me sober sinses.

Jim. I think you bloomin' Hirish are all balmy.

Michael (*annoyed*). Arrah, what can one expect from the pig but the grunt! What could the likes of you know about fairies anyway? Sure, there's none of them in the East End of London—they wouldn't be seen in the same townland wid all them thimble-riggers, pickpockets an' thieves. I wouldn't meself either if I could help it—it's no place for a dacent man.

Jim (*sarcastically*). 'Specially when 'e's taken up burglin' as a perfession 'imself.

Michael (*with a grin*). Am dam but ye have me there, I forgot what we kem out for.

Jim. You're a nice burglar, I don't think.

Michael. Well, James, I wasn't brought up to the thrade, an' it's five years since I was in the country at night.

Jim. An' if we're copped to-night it'll be five more before we are in it again, night or day. 'ere we are wastin' time when we might be 'opped on any minute.

Michael (*complacently*). No fear of that. This house has been closed for some time; there's an eight-day clock in the hall, idle with cobwebs on it.

Jim (*ironically*). You ought to be a detective.

Michael (*modestly*). A man can't do everything at once, James.

Jim. No, but you can oblige a friend by doin' one thing and that's to start work.

(*Michael rises and goes over to the desk*).

Michael. Here's a desk, now, an' a rale purty article it is. How'll I open it?

Jim (*opening the bag and passing him a "jemmy" from it*). Prize it open with that.

Michael (*toying with the jemmy*). It's such a nice article I don't like to spoil it. (*He takes a bunch of rusty keys from his pocket*). I'll thry the keys. (*He tries one in the lock*). That one's too big. (*He tries another*). An' that one's too small, an'——

Jim (*going to door on right*). Hish! Listen! A copper, I'll bet.

Michael (*after a pause*). I only heard a dure. Maybe it's a ghost.

Jim (*ironically*). Yus, or a fairy. Hish! (*He listens again*). It's coming this wye.

Michael. What'll we do?

Jim (*pointing to window*). Quick, behind the curtains.

(*Taking up the dark lamp and the bag he switches off the light and slips behind the curtains, closely followed by Michael. The right-hand door opens and Mary in a green opera cloak enters. She carries an electric torch, and when she reaches the middle of the room she clasps her hands and the light flashes into her face. She looks around as if seeking something, and, as her gaze rests on the left-hand door, she nods, and crossing to it turns the handle and passes into the other room, closing the door behind her. Jim, with his lantern in his hand, comes out quietly and turns the key in the lock. Michael pops his head out from behind the curtain*).

Michael (*in an awestruck whisper*). Did ye see her?

Jim. I should sye so. Bit of orl right, eh?

Michael. She was a ghost.

Jim. I don't think.

Michael. Well, if she wasn't a ghost she was a fairy. Didn't ye notice that she made no noise an' her walkin' across the flure, an' didn't ye see the way her face lighted up when she waved the wand she was carryin' in her hand?

Jim. Talk sense. That's the daughter of the 'ouse comin' 'ome from a dawnce.

Michael. Daughter, yer granny, comin' to an empty house with no sign of life in it.

Jim. Mayn't one 'ad time to set it right since they come back. She's probably gone to 'er bedroom that wye. In any case I've got her locked in.

Michael. I'll bet you fourpence that——

Jim. You ain't got fourpence.

Michael. Well, I'll bet you the first fourpence I get that if you open that dure ye'll not find her there.

Jim. I'll tike no bets an' I'll take no risks. Best thing we can do is to 'ook it in case she thinks of comin' back this wye.

Michael (*persuasively*). It's very lucky if ye catch a fairy.

Jim. But it ain't lucky if the fairy cops you. So we'll clear out. Come on, you silly idiot.

(*They are moving towards the right-hand door when something startles them*).

Jim. It's a copper this time, sure as shootin'.

(*They listen*).

Michael. Aisy a bit. That's not loud enough for the footstep of a bobby. Listen!

(*They listen again, and then suddenly make a rush for the window and hide behind the curtains. They are barely*

hidden when the right-hand door opens and Mr. Culvert, a stern-looking old gentleman, enters and switches on the light. He looks around the room).

Mr. Culvert. H'm! I could have sworn that I heard a noise here. (*He sniffs the air*). Remarkably stuffy atmosphere.

(*He goes to the window and draws back the curtains, revealing Michael and Jim standing to attention. He stares at them for a moment in astonishment. Michael's face breaks into an affable grin and he steps out into the room. Jim follows*).

Michael. Fine night, sir.

Mr. C. Well, 'pon my word, you're a cool customer.

Michael. Can't help that, sir; there's a touch of frost in the air.

Mr. C. What were you doing behind those curtains?

Michael. To tell the truth we wor hidin' from you.

Mr. C. I guessed that much. But what brings you here?

Michael. Would you be surprised, now if I tould you we wor policemen in Christian's clothes?

Mr. C. I certainly shouldn't believe it.

Michael (*grinning*). Ye'd be right: we're not.

Jim. It's loike this, sir. Trade bein' a bit slack——

Mr. C. Burgling is your trade, I presume.

Michael (*somewhat indignantly*). It is not, then. I'm a gardener be trade, and Jim is a handy man be profession. Aren't ye, Jim?

Jim. I should sye so.

Michael. Ye see, it's like this: Jim's sister is a kind of a widda!——

Mr. C. (*puzzled*). A kind of a widow!

Michael. Yes, a grass widda, an' she has four grass orphans. Ye see Jim's brother-in-law was after visitin' a few houses in the West End and now he's staying at a big place in Holloway.

Jim. Wot 'e means is that 'e's in jile.

Mr. C. Oh, in jail, is he?

Michael. Yes, an' his wife an' childer is, ye might say, starvin'. Me and Jim was purty hard up ourselves, so there was nothin' for it but to take up Bill's trade. So we tuk his kit of tools and kem along here. (*He indicates the bag in Jim's hand*).

Mr. C. (*regarding the tools in the open bag with some curiosity*). Are those they?

Michael. Them's them. An' that's the whole story.

Mr. C. I must say it sounds highly improbable.

Michael (*scratching his head ruefully*). Aye, doesn't it! But it's true all the same.

Mr. C. (*to Michael*). You are Irish, I think?

Michael (*proudly*). I am to the backbone. (*Truculently*). Is there anything wrong in that?

Mr. C. On the contrary I have rather a liking for Ireland. My father was an Irish landlord and I was born there.

Michael. Born there, wor ye! (*He rubs his chin with his hand*). Bedad, if I'd known that we'd never have touched your house—though, mind you, the landlords of Ireland was no friends to the likes of me.

Mr. C. (*coldly*). We will not discuss politics. The question is what what am I to do with the pair of you?

Jim. Let's off this time, guvnor. We ain't done you no 'arm. We were only just startin' on that desk when the young lidy come in.

Mr. C. (*in surprise*). The young lady! What young lady?

Jim. I thought she must be the young lidy of the 'ouse.

Mr. C. There is no lady, young or old, here. The house has been closed for some time, and I came back to-night without notice to my servants.

Michael (*triumphantly*). There y'are now! What did I say?

Jim (*impatiently*). Oh, chuck it, Mike.

Mr. C. Wait a moment. What did he say?

Jim. 'e said she must be a ghost or a fairy.

Michael. Didn't she come into the room, and pass through that dure (*pointing to door on left*) without a sound the same as if she was a ghost?

Mr. C. If she passed through that door, we can soon settle the matter. There is no way out of that room except by the window, and that would entail a twenty-foot drop.

Michael. Nothing to the likes of her.

Mr. C. We'll see.

(*Mr. C. goes to door on left and, unlocking it, throws it open. He peers in*).

Mr. C. There certainly is someone hiding there. (*Speaking into the room*). Come out into the light, madame, and let us see your face.

(*Mary comes out with hanging head, looking very shamefaced*).

Mr. C. And now, madame, pray who are you?

Mary (*nervously*). I — I — I — am your daughter-in-law.

Mr. C. (*astonished*). My what?

Mary. I am Harry's wife.

Mr. C. (*frigidly*). Indeed! And what, may I ask, brings you uninvited to my house in the small hours of the morning.

Mary (*faltering*). I—I—I'll explain.

Mr. C. (*grimly*). It will need some explanation.

Mary. I—I—that is we—I mean something had to be done. Harry is ill—he has been ill for some time—and we are very poor—he has had no briefs lately—and he needs nourishment and we couldn't afford to pay for it.

Mr. C. And so you decided to come and beg from me.

Mary. We did not: we'd sooner die than beg from you or anyone else.

Mr. C. Then why are you here?

Mary. I was on my way home from a concert at which I was singing—I earn a little that way.

Mr. C. A fine occupation for a barrister's wife.

Mary (*indignantly*). I wasn't going to stand idle as long as I could do something towards providing what was necessary.

Michael. Hear, hear!

(*Mr. C. gives him a sour look*).

Mr. C. (*to Mary*). You haven't yet explained your presence here.

Mary. Harry knew that I'd pass this house on my way home. He had seen in the newspapers that you were abroad and he gave me the latchkey he had when he was here, so that

I might get some old coins from a cabinet in the next room. He told me the lie of the house.

Mr. C. So you are worse than a beggar. You are just a common burglar like these two. (*He points to Michael and Jim*).

Michael. He says she's like us, Jim!

Jim. Wot, ho!

Mr. C. (*rubbing it in*). A common burglar, sneaking into my house to steal my property.

Mary (*bravely*). They're not your property. They're Harry's. He collected them and you have no right to them. He—he is very ill—and—there was nothing else we could think of.

Mr. C. I am not surprised to hear that Mr. Harry is beginning to realize that he would have been better off if he had not gone against my wishes.

Mary. He has done nothing he regrets.

Mr. C. He married you.

Michael (*breaking in*). An' man dear, surely ye don't think he regrets that?

Mr. C. (*to Michael*). Silence, sir! (*To Mary*). He married you against my wishes.

Michael. An' small blame to him. (*To Mary*). I'd marry you meself Miss, though I'm be nature a bachelor.

Mary (*to Mr. C.*). But why are you so angry with him for marrying me?

Mr. C. Your father was my greatest enemy.

Mary. I have heard all about that silly

quarrel. But I had nothing to do with it. I am not your enemy.

Michael (*to Mr. C.*). There now, what have you to say to that?

Jim (*in a whisper*). 'Ere, Mike, don't you put in your cutty; we're in a bad enough 'ole without gettin' 'is rag out.

Michael. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. (*To Mr. C.*). I am askin' ye what have ye to say to what the young lady sez! She never did anything on ye.

Mary. Indeed I did not.

Mr. C. You are your father's daughter, and that is enough.

Michael. Listen to me, me dacent man. Maybe if you wor blamed for all your father did you wouldn't be so high an' mighty. If it comes to that, your father was one of my greatest enemies.

Mr. C. (*in surprise*). One of *your* greatest enemies!

Michael. Aye, just. The landlords of Ireland was the greatest enemies the peasants had. I'm a peasant an' your father was a landlord, an' being so he was one of my greatest enemies. But do I bear you any ill will on that account? Divil a bit.

Mr. C. (*ironically*). You are very kind.

Michael. Don't mention it. Now what I say is this, if your son never did anything worse

than marryin' the purty little cratur here, he hasn't much to answer for. He married for love, didn't he?

Mary. Oh, indeed he did, for I had nothing else to give him.

Michael. An' what's wrong with that? Isn't it what any man'd do? Wouldn't you do it, Jim?

Jim. Don't drag me in—I ain't blaming nobody.

Michael (*to Mary*). But maybe, Miss—ma'am—he didn't marry for love himself. (*He indicates Mr. C.*)

Mary. I'm sure he did, for Harry often speaks to me of his mother, and from what he tells me no one could help loving her. (*She points to the picture over the desk*). That's her picture.

(*Michael goes over and looks up at the picture*).

Michael. So that's her picture. It was herself that had the nice kind face.

Mary. She was as kind and good as she looks.

Michael. Well, well. He married the woman he wanted an' now he casts out her son because he does the same.

Mary. Isn't it absurd?

Michael. Absurd's not the name for it, ma'am. But that's the way always when ould

people forget that they were young once themselves.

Mr. C. (*coldly to Mary*). Madame, when you are finished discussing my character with this —ah—friend of yours, you will kindly return to your husband, and tell him——

Michael (*breaking in*). Tell him that his father is cuttin' his nose off to spite his face livin' in a big house with not one in it that cares tuppence for him, when he might have yourself, ma'am, and your husband to keep him company in the latter end of his days.

Mr. C. (*with asperity*). Will you kindly keep your tongue quiet?

Michael. I will not, till I tell you the truth about yeself. There y'are now a lonely man, when you might have your gran'childer—(*To Mary*). Have ye any childer, ma'am?

Mary. A boy and a girl—the sweetest darlings.

Michael (*gallantly*). Like their mother! (*To Mr. C.*) As I was sayin', ye might be as happy as the day is long with yer gran'childer playin' about your knees. Just think, now, of the difference it would make in this ould house to hear them childer laughin' in it.

(*Mr. C. begins to walk up and down at the back of the stage sunk in thought with his hands behind his back*).

Jim. Easy, Mike, maybe the old gent don't like noise.

Michael. Arrah, sure a child's laugh is not noise—it's music.

Jim (*dubiously*). They're not always laughin'.

Michael (*in a fierce whisper*). If you don't keep your mouth shut I'll put *you* from laughin' for a month of Sundays.

(*Mr. C. stops walking, and stands for a moment looking up at the portrait. Michael catches him in the act*).

Michael. An' what would she say, I wonder (*he points to the portrait*) if she could come back an' see her son lyin' on his sick bed, and his father not puttin' one finger before t'other to help him.

(*While Michael is speaking, Mr. C. turns towards him with a far-away look in his eyes. He glances again at the portrait and then rests his chin on his hand. They all watch him in silence. Suddenly he goes over to the telephone, turns the handle and places the receiver to his ear*).

Jim (*sotto voice to Michael*). Naw, then, you've been an' gone an' done it. 'E's goin' to call up the police stytion.

Michael (*defiantly*). Let him call away.

Mr. C. (*to the telephone*). 5761x, please. (*Silence for a moment*).

Mr. C. Hello! Is that Carton's? Will you please send a taxi at once to "Tenterden," Onlney Road? Thanks.

(*He replaces the receiver and turns to Mary*).

Mr. C. I have ordered a taxi to take you home.

Mary. Thank you.

Mr. C. (*to Jim and Michael*). And now, what am I to do with you?

Jim. Don't call in the cops, guv'nor. We'll never trouble you again. Don't mind what 'e said (*he indicates Michael*). 'E's a hot-headed beggar an' 'e didn't mean 'alf of it.

Michael (*fiercely*). I'm not hot-heated, ye pup, an' I meant every word I said. I couldn't stand by and see this purty cratur browbeat an' say nothin'.

Mary. Indeed you were very kind, and if Harry were here he'd thank you too, for pleading so well for us.

Michael. He might be pleadin' for us one of these days; ye see we're kind of burglars.

Mary. Burglars! I don't believe you'd steal anything.

Michael. Well, we didn't, because we didn't get time.

Jim (*gloomily*). Strikes me we'll get time for this job later on.

Mr. C. (*to Michael*). I think you said you were a gardener?

Michael. Yes, that's what I am, and Jim's a handy man.

Mr. C. I wish to test the truth of your statement, and I expect both of you to start work on the grounds of this house in the morning. (*They are dumbfounded with astonishment. A motor horn is heard outside*).

Mr. C. (*to Mary*). There's your taxi now. You had better return to your husband.

Mary. May I take the coins with me?

Mr. C. (*shaking his head*). No.

Michael (*hotly*). An' dam but you're a hard-hearted unnatural ould divil. Ye needn't expect me to come to yer rotten ould garden.

Jim (*disgustedly*). That's what I call awskin' for it.

Mr. C. (*to Michael*). So you won't come?

Michael (*decisively*). No! I wouldn't work for the likes of you.

Mr. C. I suppose you'd work for this lady (*Points to Mary*) if she were mistress here.

Michael. I would—the nails off me fingers.

Mr. C. (*smiling*). Then you had better reconsider your decision.

(*He puts his hand on Mary's shoulder. She looks up at him in surprise*).

Michael. I beg your pardon, sir, for misjudging you. I've made a fool of myself.

Mr. C. No, but you've made a wise man of me. (*To Mary*). Come, my dear, we will go together to Harry.

CURTAIN.

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